

THE
STUDY OF LITERATURE

BY

O. J. STEVENSON, M.A.

ENGLISH MASTER, COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, ST. THOMAS

1904

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TORONTO

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We beg to report that the thesis of Mr. O. J. STEVENSON, together with his discussions of the questions set in Philosophy and Ethics, and in the Science and Art of Education, qualify him for the Degree of Doctor of Pedagogy with Second-Class Honours.

(Sgd) { F. TRACY,
 { F. W. MERCHANT.

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THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

"Art and literature lead all other branches of human learning in their capacity to manifest and illustrate the desires and aspirations, the thoughts and deeds of mankind."—HARRIS.

THE treatment of literature as a subject of study in our public schools, involves the consideration of the following questions among others: Why should literature be studied? What literature should be selected for study in the public schools? And how should the teacher present it to his classes? We will therefore consider our subject under the following heads:

- I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY OF LITERATURE
 - II. PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION OF MATERIAL
 - III. METHOD OF PRESENTATION
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I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

1. The term literature, in its widest sense, includes all records of thought in writing. In our ordinary acceptation of the term, however, as a subject of school study, we apply it only to such discourse as possesses certain well-defined qualities. *Literature must be*

In the first place, in order that discourse may be considered as literature, we require that it shall possess a certain artistic quality. A mere record of lifeless facts which are important only for the information they convey, is, for example, not dignified by the name of literature. In order that discourse may possess literary merit, attention must be given to the expression, aside from the facts ex- *(a) Artistic*

pressed. In other words, it must bear the distinctive mark of the writer's individuality, which we speak of as his literary style.

(b) An Expression of the Ideal

In the second place, the true literary quality implies that the writer, in the treatment of his subject, has idealised it to a certain extent. In all art, the artist's material is transformed and transfigured; the poet's "shaping spirit of imagination" plays over his picture and adds

"The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream;"

and in any work of literary merit, however realistic, it will be found that the author has unconsciously idealised his material, by adding here and eliminating there, until the work finally appears shaped and coloured by the imagination of the writer. In Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper*, for example, the disagreeable elements, the weariness of the toil, the poverty and ignorance of the peasant, etc., are, one and all, overlooked, and the haunting sweetness of the reaper's song is heightened by all the power of the poet's art.

It is, however, of the utmost importance that we should not lose sight of the object of the poet in thus idealising his material. The selection, elimination and re-arrangement of material has not merely for its object the heightening of artistic effect. The writer idealises his subject in order that he may convey to his reader a greater measure of truth than he could embody in the actual. Hence the well-known paradox that "fiction is truer than truth." The artist has a free hand, and therefore he discards the non-essential, and introduces new elements, so that the new whole, which he creates, represents the truth purged of irrelevant details. The literary work of art ceases thus to represent the partial truth found in the actual and individual, and stands for what is universal, what is of permanent and enduring interest. *The Solitary Reaper*

mentioned above, for example, is much more than a mere picture of an actual reaper ; it is a representation of the reaper's song, as it gives expression to the chastened sadness in the life of all men, irrespective of time, place, or nationality. It is this universal element that shines through the idealised material and gives to the poem a value which the actual details would be certain to obscure.

A third important element in literature proper, which distinguishes it from non-literary productions, lies in the character of the thought itself, aside from the way in which it is expressed. The average newspaper paragraph we do not consider as literature in the truer sense of the word, not only because it is purely a statement of fact expressed in an inartistic fashion, but because after all it deals with nothing of permanent interest or value. Literature deals with the universal, with the facts of life that are permanently true; it gives expression to the various experiences, the thoughts, feelings and actions that are common to men in all ages. The records of the ordinary incidents, of each day's trivialities, "that with the hour begin and end," are transient and temporary, and are not worth embodying in a permanent artistic form.

*and (c) A
Reflection
of Life*

2. Our definition of literature as the expression in language of those facts in life which are of permanent interest and value, and which the literary artist has idealised and presented in artistic form—this definition implies in itself the answer to the question regarding the purpose of the study of literature. Its purpose is, and must continue to be, distinctly ethical. It is by the study of literature more than by any other means that the child must learn to estimate the relative importance of the facts of human life, to interpret the conduct of the world about him, and to shape his own life in conformity with social laws. It is through the study of literature that the individual must come to recognise the truest ends in life, and must learn

*Value of
Literature
(a) As a
Reflection
of Life*

what the great men of all ages have recognised as the highest good. As a result of an intelligent study of good literature, the individual should not only become a more efficient member of society, but should also, in his individual life, learn to seek his happiness in the promotion of the general good, rather than in the lower pleasures of selfish gratification.

It follows as a matter of course that, aside from its ethical value in determining the character and conduct of the individual, it is through the study of literature that the child is enabled to appreciate the value of those facts in the history of his own community, nation, or race, the knowledge of which he must possess in order to discharge the duties of citizenship intelligently. Not only is the study of the great historians a study of literature likewise, but all study of history must be incomplete which fails to take into account the reflection of the great movements of history in prose and poetry alike. The student who wishes to estimate the importance of the institutions among which he lives, may learn the facts concerning their rise and development from the pages of history, but it is in literature proper that he must seek for the reflection of their value in contributing to human progress.

The consideration of the value of the study of literature as an expression of the ideal presented in artistic form, opens out a wide field for discussion. Much of the older teaching of literature had professedly for its aim the "culture" of the pupil. In other words literature was taught solely from the individualistic standpoint. The object of the teacher was to create in the pupil an appreciation of the æsthetic and artistic in literature, in order that he might the better be enabled to enjoy and appreciate a literary masterpiece. Now, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the question of how far the

increased "culture" or pleasure of the individual should influence the teaching of any subject. It is sufficient to point out that, while the increased efficiency of the individual, the realisation of the best that is in him, is still the object of education, nevertheless, according to modern conceptions, it is through his relation to the activities of social life alone that this self-realisation takes place. Modern education demands that the æsthetic and the artistic must have some vital connection with the active life of the individual in society, must minister to his real progress if they are to be considered as having an educational value. It is not the so-called "ornament of society," but the active minister to social needs that modern education aims to secure.

In considering our definition, we have, accordingly, to enquire into the value of the study of the ideal in literary art, and to consider in what respect the study of the artistic in literature is of importance in education.

3. In connection with the first of these questions it need scarcely be pointed out that the ability to form ideals is of paramount importance in every-day life. The word "ideal" has been so commonly used in connection with philosophy and poetry that we are apt to forget its more commonplace application. But it remains nevertheless true that the ability of the individual to form correct judgments concerning the problems of every-day life depends almost entirely upon his ability to see the ideal within the real. How dull and mechanical is the life of the individual whose whole round of thoughts and activities is dependent upon the actual experience of the past! And how slow and painful is the progress of the soul whose every step in advance is blind and tentative, instead of being determined by some conscious ideal. "The productive imagination," says Harris, "should belong not only to poets and artists, but to all men, as a faculty of

(b) *As an
Embedment
of the Ideal*

discovering ideals and emancipating us from the imperfect reality. It should give us a tendency to invention and aspiration. But under the weight of prescribed forms and the sway of memory, a civilisation crushes out self-activity on the part of the individuals, and imposes the role of external authority upon all." It is impossible to estimate fully the value of literature in leading the pupil to look beyond the real and actual to the possibilities therein contained, in perfecting the judgment, and in creating for the individual the conditions that make progress possible. As we have already pointed out, the literary artist must idealise his subject by the elimination of irrelevant material, and by creating and combining, so that the individual may embody the absolute and universal truth, which is independent of the conditions of time and place. Hence it is that literature becomes an instrument for universalising the child, for enabling him to look through and beyond the actual, to find the permanent element of truth that is embodied in it. And it is only in so far as the individual is able to look beyond the actual and to see the ideal and universal to which he may aspire, that the progress of the individual and of the race is possible.

" Each mortal in his little span
Hath only lived, if he have shown
What greatness there can be in man
Above the measured and the known ;

How through the ancient layers of might,
In gradual victory secure,
Grows ever, with increasing light,
The energy serene and pure !

The soul that, from a monstrous past,
From age to age, from hour to hour,
Feels upward to some height, at last,
Of unimagined grace and power."

4. In considering the educational value of the artistic in literature, reference must be made to two different phases of the question. In the study of the artistic in sculpture, painting, literature, etc., our attention must, in the first place, be directed to the choice and arrangement of materials—the sensuous elements in art—for the purpose of securing beauty and perfection of outward form. And in the second place, we must enquire into the spiritual significance underlying the arrangement of materials.

(a) As an
Artistic
Expression

Let us consider these questions in order. It is a commonplace that literature is the highest in the scale of the five arts, inasmuch as it is possible to embody in it the individual qualities of architecture, sculpture, painting, and music. On the side of form the literary artist is enabled to combine in his work the effects of melody and harmony, colouring and perspective, beauty of form and of movement; and to the various effects produced by the other arts he adds the distinctive characteristic of literary art, the effect of the choice and arrangement of language in artistic forms in poetry or prose in such a manner that the form will suggest and reveal the character of the thought which it clothes.

The Artistic,
(1) On its
Sensuous
Side

It is no doubt true that in the earlier stages of the child's education he is unable to appreciate the artistic, or to understand the adaptation of form to meaning in literature. The ability to do so implies a recognition of the relations between means and end which the child is incapable of until after his twelfth year at least. Nevertheless, even in the earliest stages, he is able to take pleasure from the sensuous elements in language. He is susceptible to rhythm of movement and symmetry of form, and to these susceptibilities literature makes a direct appeal. May we not say that of all the various means that education makes use of in developing in the child an appreciation of the beautiful, and a recognition

of the value of order and harmony in all things, literature is by far the most valuable. And does not the summing up of the Greek philosopher regarding the importance of this branch of education hold good, in its generality, in the present day?

"Rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, bearing grace in their movements and making the soul graceful of him who is rightly educated, or ungraceful if ill-educated; and also because he who has received this true education of the inner being will most shrewdly perceive omissions or faults in art and nature, and with a true taste, while he praises and rejoices over good, he will justly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason of the thing; and when the reason comes he will recognise and salute her as a friend with whom his education has made him long familiar."

(2) *On its
Spiritual Side*

The spiritual significance of the artistic does not appear to the pupil until he has reached the stage when he becomes conscious of the relation of the individual to the social world, until he is able to look beyond the merely utilitarian phases of society and view its purposes and its progress as a whole. When he comes to realise that the progress of the individual is conditioned by the progress of society, and when at the same time he becomes conscious of the achievements and the aspirations of the human race, it is then only that he can begin to understand the spirit of art, through which the thoughts of men are lifted above the merely temporal and utilitarian to the eternal, the divine ideal of truth and beauty,

"The one divine far off event
To which the whole creation moves."

Literature is the highest form of art, and, moreover, it is practically the only form of art to which the child has

ready access. It is accordingly to the study of the artistic in literature that we must look for the opportunity of interpreting the spirit of art in general in the advanced classes in our schools.

In our consideration of the value of the study of literature we have confined our attention to three phases of the subject :

Summary

- (1) The value of literature as a reflection of life.
- (2) The ideal in literature and its bearing on individual conduct.
- (3) The influence of the artistic.
 - (a) In developing an appreciation of the beautiful.
 - (b) As an embodiment of the spiritual aspiration of the race.

It will be hardly necessary to refer to the more practical, though less important, reasons for literary study, by which teachers and pupils alike too often estimate its value, namely, its bearing on the teaching of composition, the importance of the facts embodied in it, etc. These points will be considered in the following section in connection with the principle of selection of material for literary study, and as they are of minor importance we will accordingly pass over them at present.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION OF MATERIAL

In considering the question of selection of material for study, we must in the first place determine what literature is of the greatest value to the pupil, and in the second place briefly indicate the order in which it should be presented in the various grades.

1. The choice of material for literary study must depend, primarily, upon the aim which the teacher has in view, and we cannot do better than consider briefly some of the various aims which actuate teachers in presenting their material in literature to their classes.

*Aims of
Various
Types of
Teachers*

There are certain teachers whose constant aim in literary study is to make use of the selection as material for "mental gymnastics." To such teachers the *summum bonum*, the one indispensable, is that the pupil shall know clearly the force, the meaning, the grammatical relation, and possibly the derivation, of every important word. The harder the passage and the more bristling with mechanical difficulties, the more suitable they find it for treatment in class. To such a teacher the search for suitable material resolves itself into the question: Does this or that passage in prose or poetry present sufficient difficulty of interpretation to make it a suitable subject for treatment? Needless to say, that teaching which proceeds on this basis must be mechanical in the extreme, and it is no wonder if pupils find the subject of literature dull and uninteresting. According to Dr. Harris, "it is a poor way to study Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, and the Bible, to grammatically parse them or analyse them, or to devote the time to their philological peculiarities, the history of the development of their language, or such matters."

To a second type of teacher the whole problem of selection of material resolves itself into the question: "How can I make my work in literature *interesting* to my classes?" The problem of selection of material thus too often degenerates into the problem of entertainment. The teacher avoids taking up such passages in class as appear at the outset to be dull and uninteresting. The children crave for stories, and the craving is sometimes fed by the teacher until it comes to be a morbid appetite, and the child refuses to receive anything that is not sugar-coated with an element of adventure or romance. Or, what is equally undesirable, the teacher finds that the poetry or prose that is touched with sentiment is listened to or read with a certain interest by the class, and henceforth the presence or absence of the sentimental element becomes

the guiding principle in the choice of material for study. In such cases the teaching of literature degenerates into the application of methods for producing an unhealthy excitement. No permanent good is secured from an examination of even the best of the selections thus treated, and the pupil is permanently injured by the creation of a morbid appetite and by the formation of false ideals concerning life. If we are influenced in our teaching by the well-known dictum that all education is, in the end, heart culture, we must not overlook the fact that at the same time "feeling can be cultivated, and, in fact, is cultivated by producing the growth and development of the intellect and will."

A third class of teachers are those who themselves have some taste for literature, who can appreciate the beauty of a fine poem, and who know something of the value of good habits of reading on the part of the pupils. The aim of these teachers is to cultivate in their students a love for the best literature in poetry and prose, and to awaken in them an appreciation of the best qualities of the passages which they read. To such teachers the problem of the selection of material resolves itself simply into the search for passages of superior literary excellence to present to their classes. Their own enthusiasm carries them along and supplies the necessary stimulus, and they are abundantly rewarded if they find that they are able to create in their pupils a healthy appreciation of what is of genuine literary merit.

Yet even to the most enthusiastic teacher of this type, it is safe to say, there must come moments when it is difficult for him to avoid being discouraged and disheartened in his work; and, after the fashion of human nature, he is fain to lay the blame of his failure upon the pupils rather than upon himself. The pupil, he finds, sometimes has no language gift and no taste for literature, and, as a

result, finds the lesson irksome, and manifests a disposition to attend to other affairs of his own, more interesting than the matter in hand. The efforts of the teacher are in vain, and he is glad to ease his conscience with the solace that he has done his best.

There are, however, individual teachers to be found to whom the problem of the selection and presentation of material presents questions of a more puzzling nature, satisfactory answers to which would solve the main difficulties connected with the teaching of literature. Is it possible—such a teacher must sometimes ask—that the sole object in literature is to train the language faculties of the pupil, to awaken his emotional nature, or even to cultivate the artistic and æsthetic qualities, and to form the habit of good reading? If this is true, then, after all, literature is only an instrument of superficial polish, something which adds to the accomplishments of the so-called “ornaments of society,” something which helps to produce an external appearance of refinement and culture to which no living reality corresponds.

Is it possible, too, that, after all, what we regard as our masterpieces in poetry and prose are merely the artistic expressions of passing experiences, saved from oblivion by the attractiveness of the thought or sentiment, combined with their artistic excellence? If so, our great poets, while they are to be blessed for the charm by which through their music they have sweetened life and soothed its cares, possess, nevertheless, no further or stronger claim upon our gratitude.

It seems to me that it is upon the answer to this question that the solution of our problem depends; for, if you can reproduce for me the real spirit and the true conditions under which a masterpiece was written, if you can explain to me its title to permanence, you give me once and for all the essentially important and interesting thing,

the one thing which makes it worth my while to read it and to teach it to my classes. Let me once into the secret of why a great work was written and why it endures, and I am master of the situation. Questions of verbal interpretation, of interest of character and plot, and of artistic value, then become important only as they serve to throw light upon the expression of the dominating thought.

2. When I look over the great masterpieces to examine their title to permanence, I find that each and all possess certain individual characteristics of their own. In one I am carried away by the tide of passion, in another by the interest of character, in another by the romantic adventure, in another by the still flame of spirituality, and in still another by the lasting beauty of phrase and diction, and on first thought I might assign to each its own individual right to immortality. But it is only when I set them side by side and consider at the same time the age and the conditions under which they were produced, that I begin to find any real connection, or any vital unity.

*The Law of
Literary
Production*

To a careful student of English literature in these latter days, sooner or later the thought must come that in literature, as in all else, it is the relation of poetry and prose to progress, to the progress of society as bound up with the progress of the individual, that constitutes its real essence as literature. In other words, it is only when poetry or prose constitutes the expression of some phase of social progress, that it can have any title to permanence. The one pre-eminently and permanently interesting thing in life is, after all, not love, not war, not adventure, not artistic beauty, but the onward and upward march of the human race; and it is only in so far as love, adventure, character, etc., are bound up with the social instinct, as expressed in prose or poetry, that they can permanently endure.

This explains, in the first place, the general law of

literary production, namely, that it is only when a nation becomes conscious of human progress that great poetry is possible. While any great movement is in process of evolution, little literature of importance is ever produced. The great chorus of English song is heard only when the national heart beats high with the sense of a new and better life for mankind, when the dark storm-clouds of ignorance, of war, of social bondage are passing over, and the skies of life are once more blue. At the present moment, for example, we have no great writers, simply because the great movements which we see going on around us are, as yet, incomplete.

In one sense poets, and prose writers too, are born and not made, but in another sense, equally true, they are made, made by the conditions under which they live, made by the consciousness of the coming of better things to live for. We must ultimately judge of the value of any work of art, aside from its accidental qualities, by the extent to which it gives expression to consciousness of human progress, and to aspiration to a better life, and it is this quality which constitutes the final standard of its worth.

But at this point I am met with a number of difficulties and objections. In the first place—some one may say—if this is to be your standard, you exclude at once a great many poems which, as far as we can see, have no connection with social progress; poems, too, which, in spite of their non-social character, have stood the test of time. At first sight this appears to be true, but examine them closely and you will find that such poems have, after all, a direct bearing on social life. It may be that they reflect the conflicts, the triumphs, the aspirations, of the individual only, but aspirations which can only be realised in and through service to society. A love poem, a character study, a story of adventure, a record of individual heroism, may each and all have their roots in the social system

through which the ideals of the individual are realized.

It may be objected, furthermore, however, that in setting up this standard of good literature, we exclude as unprofitable the literature that appeals to young children, for children cannot as yet understand the conditions of social life. This is far from being a true statement of the case; for though a child cannot take a view of the social field and enter into a conscious study of social problems, it is nevertheless the social world, and the social world alone, that has any claim upon his sympathies and interest. His whole education involves the process of making him acquainted with the materials and processes of social life. Literature that has no social bearing should have no place in the primary any more than in the higher grades of the public schools. The only difference must be this, that the literature of the lower grades must be suited to the child's point of view, must represent for him from stage to stage the expression of his own consciousness of social progress.

8. But I am reminded at this point that in the selection of material I must not neglect the artistic and æsthetic qualities in literature. The necessity of providing for the artistic and æsthetic cannot be denied, but at the same time, it must be pointed out that a selection of material, along the lines here laid down, involves at the same time a selection of the best literature from the artistic side. We have already stated that the "unity in variety," in which the artistic consists, is the result of devotion on the part of the artist to the expression of the highest aspirations and purposes of the race. It is, therefore, after all, one and the same inspiration which produces the masterpiece on the side of form and thought alike. The natural language of inspiration is "simple, sensuous, and passionate," and given the conviction, the consciousness of a

*The Question
of Artistic
Form*

message to the world in the mind of the author, it cannot fail to clothe itself in artistic form.

*Correlation
with other
Subjects*

4. It is beyond the scope of this paper to treat of the subject of correlation of studies and the part that literature plays in relation to the other subjects of the curriculum. This is the battle-ground of the different divisions of the Herbartian School. To those who argue that literature should constitute the "core" on account of its moral effect, and to those who argue, on different grounds, in favour of science as the "core"—to both alike the answer may be given that a proper conception of the relation of literature and art to life, of itself gives unity to the school course without the necessity of any artificial method of correlation. Literature and art are, in reality, simply the efflorescence of science, mathematics, history, and philosophy. Or, to use the well-worn figure of speech, they are simply the reverse of the shield; and while the other subjects of the course deal with the material facts, literature and art deal with their spiritual interpretation.

Science, for example, including nature study, geography and mathematics, in addition to the science subjects proper, is the study of the methods by which men control the materials and forces of nature and convert them into food, clothing, and the means of transportation; and literature on one of its sides is a record of conquest or a cry of delight over new achievements. Science conquers nature, and poetry crowns the triumph with an immortal song. Thus it is that the old Anglo-Saxon Epic, *Beowulf*, in which the singer tells proudly of the hero who crossed the sea in ships, and who conquered the giants of the fens, and the dragons who guarded the hoard of treasure, is, after all, only the old story of the good king who drained the land, who made the barren wastes fertile and who brought peace and prosperity to his people.

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree, . . . The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

Or, to take an illustration from the study of geography—what child in the junior second grade, who has for the first time become acquainted with the facts that lie behind the children's mystery of sunrise and sunset would fail to find in the following little lyric from *A Child's Garden of Verses*, an adequate expression of his own childish wonder and delight.

"THE SUN'S TRAVELS"

"The sun is not in bed when I
At night upon my pillow lie;
Still round the earth his way he takes,
And morning after morning wakes.

While here at home in shining day,
We round the sunny garden play,
Each little Indian sleepy head,
Is being kissed and put to bed.

And when at eve I rise from tea,
Day dawns beyond the Atlantic sea;
And all the children in the west
Are getting up and being dressed."

What if the poem does contain a misstatement of fact? It is a geographical misconception which colours all our language regarding night and day, and represents accurately, at least, the child's point of view, which later instruction must, at any event, correct.

History, too, in its proper sense, does not consist of a series of facts, names, and dates, but is, on the other hand, simply a record of social progress from age to age, with all the forces—spiritual and material—which minister to it. Poetry and prose alike is, on another side, simply history touched with emotion and presented in artistic form. History might be taught, as science too often is taught, without the help of literature, but if we ignore the literature we

have merely a knowledge of facts and figures without the spiritual interpretation which is, after all, the only thing that makes education worth while. I may teach my class, for example, the main facts concerning the expansion of English trade and the extension of English Empire in the latter half the eighteenth century. I may trace the rise of the Indian Empire under Clive and Hastings, or the conquest of Canada by Wolfe. I may give the date of the founding of the first English Colony in South Africa. I may follow Captain Cook in his voyages of discovery in the South Seas. I may emphasise as strongly as I please the birth of the new imperialism, the new pride of possession, and the new spirit of interest in the people of distant lands. But, after all, it is the lonely, half-mad poet who looks out upon the world from his enforced retreat amid the Olney fens, who catches the spirit of the hour and who immortalises it in the burning words that my student of history cannot afford to miss:—

"Rome, for empire far renowned,
Tramples on a thousand states;
Soon her pride shall kiss the ground—
Hark! the Gaul is at her gates!

Other Romans shall arise,
Headless of a soldier's name;
Sounds, not arms, shall win the prize,
Harmony the path to fame.

Then the progeny that springs,
From the forests of our land,
Armed with thunder, clad with wings,
Shall a wider world command.

Regions Cæsar never knew
Thy posterity shall sway;
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they."

*The Order of
Presentation:
a Psychological
Problem*

5. Having discussed at length the principle of selection of material, it remains for us briefly to note the order in which it should be presented to the pupils in the various

grades. Should the teaching of literature begin with the reading of fairy tales and myths? Should the presentation of material follow the order of the development of the race? Should the child be introduced first to the literature dealing with the particular and concrete, the life with which he is familiar in his own community, or should his literary material deal with the general and the universal, with the experiences of people in other lands and in various ages? These are some of the questions that have engaged the attention of educators from time to time.

Now, if the ground we have taken in the previous part of this paper be correct, the solution of these problems cannot be a matter of doubt. If the literature presented to the child is to be the reflection of his own experience in social life, the final settlement of the question must be referred to the psychologist, who has made a practical study of the mental development of the mind of the child. To the question whether fables and myths are suitable material, the general answer must be made that they are suitable only in so far as they reflect for the child his own experience and his own ideals. Ruskin's *King of the Golden River*, and Hawthorne's story of *The Golden Fleece* in the *Tanglewood Tales*, are, for example, two stories told in equally simple language and in equally admirable style. A child in the junior third grade could, however, read the first and find in it the reflection of his own experience in an idealised form, while the second must appear to him as an utterly absurd and meaningless story of adventure, which could have no counterpart in the life of himself or any other human being.

If our theory is correct, the first literature presented to the child must deal, in the first place, with the actual conditions among which the child lives, with his own times and his own community, rather than with the remote past or with foreign lands and peoples in which he has no par-

ticular interest. As his experience of life widens to include his own race and other races, to include the past and the future as well as the present, the character of the literature that he reads must likewise change. It must keep pace with the development of his mind and the enlargement of his experience.

To illustrate, reference may be made to the series of lessons contained in our present Ontario Second Reader. Here are some of the subjects:—"The White Bear," "The Black Bear," "The Whale," "A Reindeer Drive," "The Lion," "The Tiger," "Elephants," "The Ostrich," "Tea," "Coffee," "Cotton," "Shapes of Snow Flakes," "The Root," "The Leaf," "The Flower," "The Fruit," "The Seed." In the opinion of the writer these subjects are totally unsuited to Ontario children of that grade. The child can have no experience of whales, or reindeer, or ostriches, etc.; he could not possibly have an immediate interest in the raising of tea, or coffee, or cotton, at least under present conditions, and the botanical lessons appeal to a much more advanced intelligence. We have abundant material in our literature that is suitable to a child of this grade—material which is a ready response to the interests, sympathies and activities of the pupil. And there is no doubt—especially now that manual training, domestic science and nature study are finding a place in the work of the school—that a progressive series of such lessons could be arranged covering the whole school course. Such a series must be planned from a psychological standpoint to correspond to the activities and interests of the child from grade to grade, so that unity and vitality may be given to the whole school course.

III. METHOD OF PRESENTATION

Having treated the question of the value of literary study, and the principle of selection of material, it remains

only for us to consider the method of presentation to a class.

1. In teaching literature the first duty of a teacher is, no doubt, to see that the pupil understands the meaning of the passage under consideration, on the intellectual side. But even in this it is possible for the teacher to make serious mistakes. It is not an uncommon thing for a teacher, in his zeal for clearness, to carry this intellectual analysis too far, by making every word or phrase the subject of comment and question. A class conducted in this way is a source of torment to all concerned. It is, of course, necessary to see that the passage is understood in all its essentials, but only such words or phrases as present special difficulty, and have a direct bearing on the interpretation of the text should receive consideration.

*Intellectual
Difficulties*

2. It is sometimes better to read a poem over in its entirety two or three times before touching on individual difficulties. And if the poem is at all obscure it is a good plan for the teacher to make the pupils close their books, and to interest them in the general thought of the poem, before even reading it at all. The problem which the teacher has to solve is that of connecting the passage in prose or poetry, which he is about to present, with the previous experience of the child, so that he will readily apperceive the new. He must create in the mind of the pupil a sufficient interest in the passage as a whole to make him eager on his own initiative to solve the intellectual difficulties which it contains.

*Relating new
Thought to
Previous
Experience*

I find, for illustration, that in teaching Tennyson's *Bugle Song* the class is listless and apathetic when I approach the subject directly and proceed to discuss its form and meaning stanza by stanza. But if, before the poem is read by the pupils, I picture to the pupils the ideal valley, the snow-capped mountain-peaks, the gray feudal castle, the glorious sunset gleaming on the rippling lake and flashing from the falling torrent on the mountain side the forest

sloping down to the side of the lake, the echoes of the bugle call, and the scarlet cloak of the huntsman as he emerges for a moment from the woods; and above all, when I complete the idyllic scene with the picture of the two lovers watching the fading sunset and listening to the dying strain of the bugle from the winding pathway in the valley, and quote the lover's comment and interpretation of it all, I know that I am sure of an eager attention, a spontaneous interest in the idealisation of the scene, in the rhythmical and artistic effects and in the simple spiritual lesson which the poem contains, and a hearty co-operation in the discussion of difficulties in the meaning of words and phrases. The latter I generally prefer to leave till the last, when the curiosity of the pupil is sufficiently aroused to prompt him to suggest the questions himself.

The treatment must, of course, vary with almost every passage that is studied. In some cases the pupil may be asked to read the poem over, to describe the scene and suggest an interpretation for himself; and in other cases a written reproduction of the thought, or of the scene or story, in the pupil's best style, may make a fitting conclusion to a more detailed examination of it in class.

*Stages in
Mental
Development*

3. In considering thus the general method of presentation of a passage in literature to the class, we must not, however, lose sight of the necessity of adapting our method to the requirements of the pupil in the various stages of his growth. Up to the age of eight years, or approximately so, the child is interested in the immediate activities of the world about him, rather than with distant ends or purposes. In other words he is at the stage of sense-perception, and literature for him must reflect the impressions which he has of his social surroundings, the world as it is being revealed and unfolded to him through the five senses. In the presentation of literature selections to the

primary classes, therefore, the teacher must be guided by the interests of the child, and that side of the literature that deals with the world of sense must receive the greatest emphasis. The attention of the pupil must be directed to means and end only as it appears in its simplest form; the question of what is done, rather than why and how it is done, is of permanent interest to the child at this stage.

The second stage, approximately from eight to twelve, brings with it a recognition of ends to which activity is directed. "The mere play of activity no longer suffices." The child becomes interested in the direction of his activity to the accomplishment of some design connected with the life of himself or others—and this side of the literature must be emphasised more strongly at this stage. He must find in it suggestion for the direction of his activity towards the accomplishment of something in which he is interested, and accordingly the ideal element in literature must not be overlooked in presenting a passage to a pupil at this stage.

In the third stage of development the mind of the pupil begins to reflect on the relation between means and end, and on the meaning of the ideal in itself. In this stage, therefore, attention must be paid to the thought of the writer in its entirety; and the unity of the passage on its intellectual and spiritual side—material, end, means—must now for the first time become apparent to the pupil. The teacher must accordingly be careful that the meaning of the passage, and its relation to life as embodying a permanent and universal truth is brought home to the pupil.

4. But the teacher must not consider his duty done when he has succeeded in making the pupil *understand* the meaning of the poem. It is one thing to have the pupil understand the bald statement of thought; it is

*Spiritual
Interpreta-
tion*

another and infinitely more important thing to have him *feel* its inspiration in such a way that his conduct in life will consciously or unconsciously be affected by it. The spiritual and universal element in literature, its significance as an interpretation of life, is closely related to the emotional and the æsthetic, and the question is: How can the teacher, who appreciates the spiritual element in literature, communicate this appreciation to his pupils? One thing is practically certain, that there is no use in the teacher attempting to "preach" to his classes regarding the spiritual element in a particular passage. He may, if he pleases, give his class in a few words the point of view, or elicit it from them by a question, but for the rest he must rely on the only instrument of emotional expression that we have, namely, the voice. Every teacher of literature should cultivate the art of expressive reading, for it is only through expressive oral reading that the emotional element in any passage in prose or poetry may be conveyed.

Memorisation

5. Dr. Harris has pointed out the danger of arrested development that may result from too great attention to mechanical memorisation. The memorisation of literature selections must not be carried to excess, but at the same time it is important that the pupil should be required systematically to commit to memory the finest passages in the poetical literature that he studies in class. "Memorising, especially," says Rosenkranz, "is an excellent preparatory school for the thinking activity, because it gives practice to the intelligence in exercising itself in abstract ideas." Whole poems should be memorised, rather than fragments, and an occasional review should be held to test the thoroughness of the pupil's work. If literature is properly presented to the class in the first place, the memorising will appear to the pupil rather as the natural completion of the lesson than as a formal task.

Not only is reading over a passage in its entirety a better process of memorising than learning it stanza by stanza, but when the child is in a position to see the unity of a poem, and the relation of the various parts to that unity, the memorising is completed with a minimum of effort. As a general thing, after the meaning of the poem is considered, the reading of the passage by the teacher and by the pupils a number of times, for the purpose of bringing out the spiritual meaning, has the effect of impressing it on the minds of the pupils so that little further repetition is required.

6. When the lesson has been fully considered by the class, and the important features in it have been dealt with in turn, the teacher should recapitulate to the class, in brief, the chief points contained in the lesson, so that the pupil may have a clear idea of the new material presented in it and its relation to his former knowledge and experience. Or, if preferred, the pupils may be required to reproduce the important features for themselves, either orally or in writing. And as a means of stimulating the observation and interest of the student, as well as of impressing certain features of the lesson on the pupil's mind, any interesting parallel passage in poetry or prose which the teacher is familiar with should be read or recited to the class.

Recapitulation

7. The success of a teacher of literature, it may be pointed out in conclusion, must to a large extent depend on his own point of view and his own appreciation of the essential elements of good literature. No teacher can hope to succeed, in the wider sense of the term, unless he has himself grasped the significance of literary production, and has recognised its necessity, unless he can see the relation of poetry and prose alike to life around him, and can translate his own feelings and those of the poet into the experiences of the child, so that he will find in litera-

The Duty of a Teacher of Literature

ture the reflection of his relations to the social world. He must find in literature the breath of life that will clothe the dry bones of his school work with flesh and make them move and live. He must seek in literature the interpretation of the facts of history and science. In other words, to put it in its plainest possible form, every teacher must be a constant student of English literature. A teacher who does not read, who does not, as far as in him lies, keep himself in close touch with the great interpreters of human progress, should be ashamed to stand before a class whose destinies are, so to speak, in his hand.

The old idea that the teacher's duty is to make a scholar, first and foremost, out of his pupil is passing out. The teacher's function is a vastly higher and more important one—to train and direct in his pupil a social agent who will find the highest realisation of himself in serving society and helping his fellow men. This is the high calling of the teacher.

"Servants of God! or sons
Shall I not call you? because
Not as servants ye knew
Your Father's innermost mind,
His, who unwillingly sees
One of his little ones lost—
Yours is the praise, if mankind
Hath not yet in its march
Fainted, and fallen, and died!"

GENERAL LESSON PLAN

- I. **INTRODUCTION**—Connect the lesson with the pupil's previous experience, and arouse his interest by an outline of the contents of the passage to be presented.
- II. **CRITICAL EXAMINATION**—The passage considered in detail, as to expression. Difficulties presented by pupils. Questions suggested by the teacher. Topical treatment, if passage admits.
- III. **SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION** — Strictly possible in fourth book and high school classes only. In junior classes, further application of the passage to the experience of the child.
- IV. **RECAPITULATION OF PARTS OF IMPORTANCE**—Reading of interesting parallel passages. Memorisation and reproduction by the pupil in composition or in drawing.